

Guye Blood

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English 101-09

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### The Wilderness v. Walking

What is the thesis of Walking? What is the Thesis of the Wilderness Letter? Are the authors asking a question or making a statement? Were the authors influential during their lifetimes? Both Thoreau and Stegner are passionate authors of different times and a different era, but each has an adoring kinship for the wilderness and advocate for its preservation.

In 1851 Henry David Thoreau delivered a lecture entitled Walking that was later published, after his death, in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1862. In 1960 Wallace Stegner wrote a letter to David E. Pesonen of the Wildland Research Center entitled The Wilderness; that letter was later published in his book *The Sounds of Mountain Water*.

One has to wonder if Stegner and Thoreau came from the same cloth. Each had an appreciation for the value and sanctity of the wilderness. Both showed a respect for its boundaries, unlike the common man surrounded by the wild at civilization's edge -- hurrying about his daily tasks of destroying one to build another -- who never stopped long enough to ponder its destruction. Thoreau writes of his distress concerning the destruction of the wild: from surveying property owners ascribed in their deeds, to home builders destroying the forests that surrounded town, choking off and polluting his access to his freedom and absolute need to walk unobstructed in any direction. Stegner, 100 years later, lives in a society already encroached upon by Thoreau's distresses. He too argues for the preservation of the last of the Wilderness -- if for no other reason than just to know the Wilderness exists for the renewal of his sanity, health and spirituality.

The similarities go on and on, but the differences in their styles are evident as well.

Thoreau lives in more rugged times and is hardened by the wild, as he alludes to in his published lecture: man and farm animal can be tamed to civilization, but in each are still wild oats to be sown. Thoreau prefers returning to the wild with a walk, to sitting in civilization's soft cushion. Stegner, less hostile toward civilization, still makes the point that society will lose its freedoms and its retreat from its very own pollutants if we continuously encroach upon, and destroy, the Wilderness. He equates the death of the Wilderness with a death in us: "...as the remnants of the unspoiled and natural world are progressively eroded, every such loss, is a little death in me. In us" (Stegner).

Each author is different in their styles, times and eras, yet both champion for the preservation of not only a geographical place, but a realm of self-renewal. Further, they seek a place where we can return to the wild-peace in each of us, a status symbol of our freedoms and what it means to be an American -- a place that can only be described as the Wilderness.

Works Cited

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